

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COVID-19 Cases and Vaccinations Update

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) received additional COVID vaccine from the state to meet the demand from their partners and individuals wanting to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Vaccination rates across the health district have reached 42%. This number includes fully vaccinated as well as partially vaccinated individuals.

“We understand the concerns people have about their health and the safety of the COVID vaccines. Getting this vaccination is a hard decision whether you choose to get it or you choose not to get it,” states Melissa Propp, SWNPHD Public Health Nurse. “Public health officials across the state are keeping a close eye on the new COVID-19 variants that are quickly spreading throughout the state. SWNPHD and the state of Nebraska also closely monitor any reported complications of these vaccines. Right now, the risk of severe illness from COVID-19 is the most serious threat to our communities.”

The type of vaccine used for the Pfizer and Moderna COVID vaccines was being studied for many years before being put into use for COVID-19. Researchers began working on mRNA vaccines after the SARS coronavirus was identified in 2003. This work was based on research that had started in the 1990’s when scientists began exploring how to improve vaccine technology by using mRNA. The development of the COVID vaccines was helped along by Operation Warp Speed, which made them a top priority, concentrated the efforts of many skilled individuals, and removed any delays normally caused by red tape.

COVID Vaccine Timeline

- 1990’s: mRNA research began in the US and other countries
- 1990’s – ongoing: Researchers study potential mRNA vaccines for diseases like HIV, RSV, MERS and SARS
- 2017: A clinical trial showed mRNA vaccine is effective against skin cancer (melanoma)
- November 2019: First case of COVID-19 is confirmed in China
- January 2020: Virologists identified the genetic sequence of the virus that causes COVID-19
- March 2020: Operation Warp Speed was put into place to help develop the COVID-19 vaccine, and clinical trials begin for Moderna and Pfizer
- July 2020: Moderna released results from Phase 1 and 2 clinical trials showing how the vaccine functioned and its safety
- August 2020: Pfizer-BioNTech released results from Phase 1 and 2 clinical trials as well
- Summer 2020: Phase 3 clinical trials are held for Moderna and Pfizer that tested how well the vaccine protects against COVID-19. Results show around 95% effectiveness for both vaccines.
- December 2020: After careful review and consideration of these results, the Food and Drug

Administration (FDA) gave authorization for the emergency use of Moderna and Pfizer during the COVID-19 pandemic

- Mid-December 2020: Vaccinations against COVID-19 began in the U.S.
- May 2021: Pfizer EUA expanded to 12 and older

Propp continues, “Due to the increased number of COVID-19 cases, our hospitals are having to send patients to other hospitals in order to receive care. If we can get more people vaccinated, they will be less likely to need medical care or be hospitalized. Then our hospitals and clinics won’t have to bear such a heavy load.” All three COVID vaccines approved for use in the United States provide protection against severe illness, hospitalization, or death from COVID-19. There are multiple cases of COVID-19 that have been hospitalized throughout the health district. All are unvaccinated.

SWNPHD had 78 new cases of COVID-19 reported from July 27 to August 9, 2021, bringing the weekly average from 28 to 39 cases per week. Seven of these cases were identified in an audit of previous case data from the fall peak. The total number of cases is 4,034.

SWNPHD strongly encourages using the recommended precautions of frequent handwashing, wearing a mask over your nose and mouth if you are not vaccinated or will be around others who are not vaccinated, and staying home if you are sick. Avoid enclosed crowded spaces or gatherings.

Visit swhealth.ne.gov for information on where to find COVID vaccine. You can also follow SWNPHD on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. SWNPHD serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. SWNPHD is located at 404 West 10th St (1 block north of Arby’s) in McCook and can be reached by calling 308-345-4223.

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